

1 Hunger for Fury. The 1st Gulf War.

"Do you have any idea why you're here?" She asked as if the question applied to his entire life.

"Dr. Willis wanted us to chat," Doc recovered.

She moved slightly, the black dress revealing some hints of salt-colored stitching.

"You're a psychiatrist. I don't need you." She stared at the window, green from the brushing foliage outside. "I know why I'm depressed."

"Why is that, may I ask?"

"Because I'm a ninety year old black Quaker Lady who has endured extraordinary stupidity, and now that I'm about to die we have won! Won! Some silly miniature war where young men got plowed with bulldozers, and others exploded by smart bombs.

"Smart bombs! And these, of course, are young men who do not look like ours. The repeated fad, murdering those unlike you. Once, the victims were my ancestors. Very American. I

believe we invented the Gulag to benefit our Japanese citizens, also.

"You're making a mental note, aren't you, Doctor? *Shows interest in politics.*"

"Yes. I'd think of that as healthy."

"And now there's a parade! A parade for what?—or could you always ask that question, and in all times? Isn't such a...insane fete usually the end product of tragic stupidity?"

"I don't know. That may be too heavy for me right now.

I'm still jangling from quite a bit of traffic, and parking was... Well! Anyway! I'm much more interested in you, not my bellyaches, common to everyone," Doc had switched back to healer.

"The Gulf War! Another glorious chapter, however small.

Do you believe one can die of a broken heart, young man?"

"Thanks for the compliment. And yes I do."

"Well, there's nothing more to know about me." A tiny, resigned smile within the play of dappled light across her face. Though he probed a little, she stayed firm in her conclusion. And Doc looked back many times on that day in Media, Pennsylvania, her in that window as if chiseled, staring at a green emptiness.

When he got to his car, a fat courthouse guard was perched on a fender. "Hey! Here come the majorettes!" he winked.

Doc saw only a shuffling front of red and white turning a corner.

"You can smell the hair burning in their tight little twats.

Oh mama! How'd you like to dip your wick in something like that?

So tight that tears'd roll down your face!"

"Uh huh, well, before they engulf everything here, I've got to get moving. I'm a physician and..."

"Hey I like that 'engulf.' Like the Gulf War, right?"

"I didn't mean..."

"Yeah we don't never mean nuttin." The guard knew this mockingly illiterate sarcasm presented him as superior.

"Why don't you just take it easy, Doc? We don't have that many wars anymore, we shouldn't celebrate greasing the little fuckers that threatened our little bitty finger-fucked daughters, know what I mean? I mean, like now we got heroes, Doc! It's been a long fuckin time since we had fuckin heroes--we really had hardons for some to come along.

"Why we couldn't fuckin stand it for one more minute!

And walkin' around with one all day hurts like hell! So give us, like, a break! That's why the marching bands and little whores, and all the yellow ribbons! It's the heroes, Doc. Wake fuckin

up!”

Doc said he'd try, as the guard still waved a jellied arm to indicate the ribbons tied onto trees and poles. Doc noted the brassy glint of instruments far down that brilliant, leafy avenue, and heard the muddy music for the first time.

Doc left him with “Don't think I agree with what you're saying!” “Ooooo! Wanna have a war about it? Let's be heroes ourselves and give everybody hardons for us! Us! Oh excuse me, Doctor! erections!”

“How do you know one of these girls isn't my daughter?”

“You should be so lucky!”

The guard finally directed him out, his car inching back through phalanxes of restless, shifting cheerleaders in maroon and silver, blue and gold. Junior high girls, stick-thin.

When Doc drove on a parallel block he remembered Skipper, the patient from the Korean War he was to see at the Veterans' hospital. 'Old Popsicle Fingers' painfully typing letters on an old portable to petition relief for Agent Orange victims of Vietnam.

A dull thump of drums commenced, and as the car reached cross blocks, wind-thrown blasts of music vibrated rills of brassy light.

In the gritty shaking, the black woman's strong phrases, too,

returned. From out of such fragility. *Young men who do not look like ours.*

Doc shook his head in fatigue, signaling to himself that you must sometimes escape stinging realists.

"Well, all young men look like ours," Doc finally whispered, the darkened image of the dying vet thrusting up his swollen fingers into gnashing slants of light.

And then in one of those bizarre exclamation points that scattered days can have, Doc's car became surrounded by beefy-faced veterans, older men in various dark blue uniforms, and literally going in all directions.

They, in turn, became distributed among sun-bright bunnies. Seven year olds, with bobbing adult bunnies trying to dam their meanders.

After ten minutes of this mix of freshness and rum blossoms, with the kids now screaming and the oldsters singing, a flustered official herded the scarlet vets down a street towards the

parade route. The bunnies followed warily, perhaps sensing their leaders' worry that the path would divert to a tavern.

"A manga," Doc remarked aloud. "This is the way the world will end, not with a bang, or whimper...more like the frenzied chaos of Japanese comic books."

And after he got slowly moving again, Sousa-like music reached him, and he drummed the dashboard to its martial beat.

Much later in the doctors' lounge, two so exhausted they would rather talk than move. Surgeon, Dr 'Buster' Dieter, still in his operating scrubs, commented on Doc's slow retelling of his day. "Hey Shrink! Lots of things don't really connect. You just can't put them together to mean anything. They just hang there, isolated forever. If you're with a patient, introduce another subject.

"Manga you describe it. I think of Breughel, the painter, those scenes swarming with peasants. My ancestors, mobs of horny drunks. A little like a Penn State football rally.

"Shrink! The end of a war! Celebrate! Although that guard was vulgar and disgusting, he was right. Anyway, we make too much of vulgarity in this country. It's harmless and silly. Like the guard himself. Political appointee. Someone's retarded cousin Elmo.

"And the sour Quakers say we don't need wars, that they're immoral. At the opposite pole, we get such incredible heroism, such sacrifice! Those youngsters feel that they're putting their lives on the line for you and me! How could you not admire all that? Don't answer! Because I'm afraid you might have answers. "Or think you do. At any rate"—tapping his paper hat—"I've had

three emergencies today and about seven gray cells remain.

"My patients fought in wars, I remind you. I don't know about the wars, not completely, but the two soldiers and the marine I operated on today had high, even holy, purpose.

We're not to forget that!

"For Patriot Dream, shall I sing it for you? God mend thy every flaw. God the surgeon, hey? For patriot dream!

"You work towards America the Beautiful, Shrink. You don't just damn it! And neither do you praise and flatter it brainlessly!

"How about thy liberty and law?" Doc challenged. "What liberty? What law? Racism and exploitation and bribery?"

"Work in progress. Slow-www climb uphill. Well, anyway, make a German a citizen and this is what you get! Certainly no blind follower in the cliché of American movies! Lockstep! Lockbrain! Locksoul! Uh uh, but realist and dreamer combined. Wow! You got me giving speeches and I'm dead. Can't walk. At any rate, when Utopia arrives will I get a registered letter?" he sighed.

Under the harsh light, Doc could barely see Buster's eyes.

"I'll put you on the list!" he informed him, laughing afterwards.

"Besides," recovered Buster, "are you going to outlaw dangerous excitement? Last August, I was on a panel, Lutheran Seminary on Germantown Avenue. Faith and Medicine. After, bounced along

those damn cobblestones to the Sunoco.

"When I get out of the car to gas up in that brutal heat, I can feel a fury. Palpable! Black kids are arguing, yelling, screaming, slamming doors. That horrendous heat doubles all the sounds! I get out of there so fast, had to stop on Washington Lane to take the gas cap off the roof of my car. Scared shitless!

"And yet, and yet, part of me yearns for such menace, to be in the middle of it. Crazy."

"A hunger for fury."

"Nice way to put it. You can't outlaw excitement, as I say."

"Murder there a few weeks ago, at that same station. Let's hold onto our surgeons—at the cost of discouraging their thirst for homicidal action."

"Oooops, distorting the argument there, Shrink!"

"I'm not always fair or nice."

"That right? My grandfather's proverb applies to you: A village's wealth consists of the few who can't even pretend to villainy."

"Lost something in translation?"

"Not as much as I did. I was a silent, outsized intellectual of a German kid who learned football from Air Force

guys.

Next time I turned around...this painfully mediocre defensive tackle at Penn State. It's why I went to the medical school at Hershey, and practice in Pennsylvania: Pay back the people of the Commonwealth for that astonishing football scholarship."

"Conscience, hey? Got one myself. I hear some physicians count it as a professional hindrance."

In the florescent hospital lobby, two nurses decorate a kind of polished aluminum hat rack with yellow ribbons, the older one agonizingly meticulous as to the placement of each one. As this older nurse waves goodnight to Doc, the younger one shoves the apparatus over, ribbons tumbling. "So clumsy! Excuse me."

Unlocking his car door Doc chuckles, "So a small anarchy trumps--for the moment."